

“Media Ownership Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking. Docket 06-121.”

It was common knowledge soon after the radio was invented that there would need to be regulations and guidelines so as to prevent cross-over or dominance in the airwaves. These rules are something that must still remain today. However, a lot has changed since the Radio Ownership Limits were last capped by Congress in 1996. The restraints, which are based on a sliding scale, increases with the size of the local market. Today, the corporate market is one that is almost impossible to break through. Therefore, the limits should be revised based on the existing evidence which foreshadows a dangerous monopoly. I feel that there needs to be a cap established to prevent the large corporations from dominating media markets. Keeping different sized markets as well as large and local corporations in mind, I decided upon the following caps as a general rule, that one entity may own for the radio stations: stations need to be strictly limited and capped to a certain number of commercial stations depending on the size of the bandwidth in the area. The larger the area, the more stations the corporations may own; likewise, the smaller the area, the less stations the corporations may own. However, it is important for the FCC to be strict in regulating these caps and to watch who owns the radio stations carefully.

Although these caps may seem a little bit restrictive, these regulations are necessary for several reasons. In today's radio world, many Americans want a “safe”, gated-in listening experience to fit our structured lives. However, the listening which we are exposed to today is much more than just “safe”. Instead, it is sculpted to what the four major corporations want us to hear. These four companies control 2/3 of the nation's news format radio programs. According to Columbia Journalism Review, two of these firms, Viacom and Disney, also control major television networks. With this said, is it okay for these large companies to control much of what you hear? With these corporations owning so many stations, they have the power to decide what is put on their stations, what is said on their station, and everything that goes on within the station. With multiple stations owned, think of how much control these large companies have over the majority of our media. Because of this, I, along with hundreds of public interest groups and millions of ordinary citizens, feel that there need to be Radio Ownership Limits.

For starters, I cannot seem to grasp why if there are so many supporters of media regulations, that this is something that is still being argued. The Supreme Court says it best when they say that the aim of Federal Communications Law is “to secure maximum benefits of radio to all the people of the united States,” and also to prevent public interest from being subordinated to “monopolistic domination in the broadcasting field.”

With the way the radio is set up today, there is still not room for smaller, local companies to have access to such a communication point. Instead, the large companies take over many of the licenses, making it very

difficult and unaffordable for small companies to have a station and become successful. Although the FCC attempted to make small companies have a chance with low-power FM stations, they were still impractical. These stations needed to be spread too far apart, leaving no room on the broadband, and non-existent in metropolitan areas where the high-powered FM stations blocked them out due to interference.

Representative Bernie Sanders of Vermont, the leading Congressional critic of media monopoly explained that, "it is not a coincidence that everything blew up the way it did this year. The American people know they are getting less information than they had before about decisions that are being made in their name, and they know that we are passing some critical points where, if we don't act, citizens are not going to have the information they need to function in a democracy." However, not all people are as uninformed as you would believe. To many Americans, it is clear that the one-size-fits-all moment has already arrived. Newspaper Guild president Linda Foley confirms this when she states that "They know that if one company owns most of the media outlets in their town, in their state or in the country as a whole-they are going to get a one-size-fits-all news that is a lot more likely to serve the people in power than it is the public interest and democracy." With the implementation of media ownership rules, they would support democratic values by helping ensure the public has access to multiple voices and opinions in a diverse media culture.

Without caps, the large corporations will be taking from the diversity. Mark Cooper, the director of research for the Consumer Federation of America, states that "stations that consolidate don't produce more news, they produce less. And diversity news and opinion from the most influential media declines. The record is clear. More consolidation hurts our democracy without any discernible benefits." Radio stations should be broadcast on networks which are operated by multiple, diverse and independent owners who employ a diverse workforce. It is important to allow minorities a chance to succeed as well. While women account for 51% of the population, only 5% of them own a station of some sort. Racial and ethnic minorities own around 3% of all stations while accounting for 33% of the population. The consolidation of such viewpoints is harmful to our society seeing as we are only allowing some view points to be exposed. Additionally, the consolidation decreases the amount of variety on the airwaves essentially making the caps even more necessary.

Much like these caps I have suggested thus far, many groups agree and feel that regulations should be implemented. They also considered the loss of media broadcasting to the Internet, something which they found is not going to happen anytime soon. In more than 800 pages of comments and studies submitted by Consumers Union, Consumer Federation of America, and Free Press, the groups urged the FCC to adopt media ownership rules which encourage diversity and competitiveness between all media outlets. In

this Gene Kimmelman, vice president for federal and international policy for Consumer Union stated that “a vast majority of Americans still rely on locally owned radio, television stations and newspapers as their most important source for local news and information. Cable and Internet are no substitutes.” In these studies they found that 88% of people still rely on these media outlets despite the growth of the Internet.

With all the facts laid down already, I want to address one of the main reasons I feel there should be stricter caps. This is because, as the radio stands today, it limits free expression. Right now, there is less freedom to play what the DJ wants more than ever before. Instead it is up to the corporation to decide what is played. A study of radio music programs after the consolidation of ownership that followed the 1996 Telecommunications Act found that despite different names for programs and formats, such as “Adult Contemporary” or “Classic Rock”, many of the same songs were played repeatedly, with as much as 76% overlap across different formats. This is important to know because the attitudes which are stated over the airwaves shape the way the public thinks. With only a few main companies releasing their ideas through broadcasting, these powerhouses have the ability to create media that they want all of America to hear. We are given the right to communicate with one another, to share political ideas without fear of censorship, and to create and recreate our culture together. At best, the media encourages and supports our free speech rights, giving us opportunities both to speak and hear speeches from a variety of people. This is something that is not allowed for everyone because of the large corporations that dominate the marketplace. It is this imbalance that places America’s democracy, culture, and economy at risk. With the limiting of how many stations an entity can own, this would control how many stations they were able to influence, essentially allowing other’s viewpoints to be released.

On a more personal note, I can’t remember a time in my life when I didn’t listen to the radio. I grew up in the suburbs of Chicago, so the broadcast market I lived in was the third largest in the nation. Ever since I was a little kid I can remember listening to the radio on the way to school, or when I grew older, listening constantly trying to hear my new favorite songs, and now listening to it for hours at a time while driving in the car. I had my choice of the 12 registered A.M. stations, and 25 registered F.M. stations, however there were still times I could find nothing to listen to. George Jones, the country legend, said it best at the Federal Communications Commission hearing when he said, “You know sugar is sweet. But too much can kill you. I ask the FCC Commissioners not to let the radio industry consolidate any further so that my fans and my public can continue to hear my music. Please don’t make it any rougher for recording artists like me or for tomorrow’s rising stars.” Siding with Jones, a metropolitan area radio is very much a mold. You hear the same songs over and over and these “safe” songs are what make the corporations the most money. This is what the corporations

want to do: make the most money. They want to dominate the airwaves, decide what gets to be played on all the stations and create a monopoly that no other corporations can touch. Imagine life without these artists that have impacted you in so many ways. Now think, if the large corporations only play the “safe” artists, will you miss out on opportunities to hear new material and artistic abilities?

With the ongoing continuation of battles between outsiders and the FCC, there has to be something done. I propose that regulations be strict, much like the ones I have already created. They should be well developed so that the small stations have a chance and to not let radio broadcasting turn into the monopoly we are headed towards as of today. In order to do this, the FCC needs to step up and promote three things: local ownership of broadcast outlets, ownership opportunities for new broadcasters (especially minorities), and finally real competition between multiple outlets and multiple stakeholders in every community. These standings are opposed by hundreds of public interest groups and millions of ordinary citizens. Please remember, these are your listeners. Would you rather have them tune in? Or tune you out?

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